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**An opposing view**

## Media won victory, and so did the public

WASHINGTON — The resolution of Gen. Ariel Sharon's libel suit against *Time* and Gen. William Westmoreland's suit against CBS is good news for the two news organizations involved — and for the vast reading and viewing public served by all the news media.

Both cases were showpiece political attacks on the integrity of two of the country's most respected news organizations; and both news organizations won their court cases, although in different ways.

Westmoreland withdrew his case as evidence mounted that CBS was correct when it said he had participated in a plan to mislead the public on U.S. military progress in Vietnam.

The Sharon jury found that *Time* — even with its famous triple-check accuracy system — could not avoid an error, but the error was unintentional.

We cannot have aggressive, independent news organizations reporting complicated and controversial issues if every word and every nuance must in all instances always be absolutely accurate and meticulously balanced for "fairness."

The press is like other institutions composed of people: No individual or group of people can always be perfect.

Furthermore, even the most knowledgeable experts and experienced reporters and editors can come to different conclusions when analyzing the same news event, especially news events arising from pro-

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lix circumstances such as Vietnam and the Middle East.

We should be proud that our citizens receive more information about the society in which they live and from a wider variety of news sources than other people in the world — thousands of newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations.

And we should be proud of a system that produces so few misstatements, considering the volume and diversity of this massive news delivery system.

Our vigorous and inquiring press, acting as a surrogate for both majority and minority views, must have "breathing space" to make an occasional error, whether it is investigating Vietnam, the Middle East or pay-offs in local gravel contracts or zoning ordinances.

Evaluation of our news media should not be based on the temporary emotions of occasional celebrated libel cases.

That evaluation should produce an uncontested conclusion: We must maintain the system envisioned by the First Amendment, wherein popular and unpopular ideas can flourish and be debated in the marketplace of public opinion — rather than being intimidated into silence by the fear of heavy libel judgments.